

## State, Landlords, and Peasantry in Taiwan's Post-war Agrarian Transformation, 1945-1953

Chi-wei Liu and Chih-ming Ka

### ABSTRACT

This article studies the interaction among the state, landlords, and peasantry in Taiwan post-war transformation of land tenure, in particular the land reform of 1949-1953. As widely known, the land reform constitutes a key to the understanding of development and social change in post-war Taiwan. However, most writers fail to locate the post-war land reform in the long-term socio-economic change of Taiwan and therefore are unable to provide a historical explanation for the interaction among the state, landlords, and peasantry. Most studies on Taiwan's land reform tend to highlight how the KMT state reconstructed the class relationship in the countryside to form a small-holding agrarian society, which served its political purposes as well as the squeeze on agricultural surplus. As widely assumed, the state by means of defining property rights and taxation is able to shape the class structure. Yet, as shown in this study, the KMT state was not free to do so. Reshaping the agrarian class relationship through land policies not only depended upon the KMT state's institutional capacity, but was constrained by existing class forces. The interests and political resources of the collective actors can be traced back to their positions within the existing social structure. Actors make their own choice of action according to their strategic positions in the interest-conflicting social structure. As shown in this study, no one (not even the state) enjoyed absolute sway over the others. Applying a path-dependent perspective, the authors aim to reveal how the pre-existing socio-economic structure provided possibilities and imposed constraints toward Taiwan's post-war land reform. Comparing the interaction among three main collective actors—the state, landlords, and peasantry—in various historical conjunctures, the paper highlights the “politics” in the post-war land reform in order to illuminate how the alliance and conflicts among actors led to the forced reduction of the rent rate (1949) and eventually to land redistribution (1953).

**Keywords:** Land reform, grain procurement system, state, class